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ABSTRACT

This digest highlights features of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), explains how to use the system most effectively, and offers suggestions on how teacher education faculty can present and use the ERIC system to supplement classroom instruction. Following a description of how resources in ERIC can be helpful to teachers and teacher candidates, a discussion is presented on what teacher candidates should know in order to use ERIC effectively. Some suggested activities for classroom follow-up are offered. (JD)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER FOR TEACHER CANDIDATES. ERIC Digest #10.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHER EDUCATION

ERIC DIGEST 10

1986

The Importance of The Educational Resources Information Center For Teacher Candidates

The ERIC system can be a vital resource for teacher education, offering not only research findings but practical ideas and information that teacher candidates can use throughout their professional careers. This digest highlights ERIC's features and how to use the system most effectively. It offers suggestions on how teacher education faculty can present and use the ERIC system in their classrooms.

What Is ERIC?

It's the world's largest educational database—used by researchers, education professionals, and policy makers around the world. It's the Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC for short. ERIC can expand teacher candidates' knowledge of the profession, broaden their career horizons, and give a lifelong resource for improving professional competence. This digest highlights ERIC's features, explains how to use the system most effectively, and offers suggestions on how teacher education faculty can present and use the ERIC system to supplement classroom instruction.

Why Do Teacher Candidates Need To Use ERIC?

ERIC is the most comprehensive education information service for teachers and teacher candidates.

Accessibility. The largest educational database in the world, ERIC contains more than 500,000 documents and journal articles from all areas of education. Many documents are included, research reports to curriculum guides, pamphlets to conference papers. The system is accessible either by computer or through print indexes, using the information published in its two monthly indexes, *Resources in Education* and *Current Index to Journals in Education*, found in university libraries nationwide. The indexes provide full bibliographic citations and abstracts for each entry, along with subject and author indexes. The full text of RIE documents is available on microfiche in the library collections. Computer searches of the database are also available in more locations than the microfiche collections.

Lifelong Resource. Learning the ERIC system gives teacher candidates access to materials for term papers, bibliographies, and other research assignments. But more importantly, ERIC offers a lifelong entry to the education profession's comprehensive resources. In addition to research findings, ERIC documents and journal articles contain many practical "ideas that work"—suggestions on classroom management, curriculum enhancements, handling discipline problems, and information on current educational and professional issues such as teenage pregnancy, merit pay, career ladders, and teacher evaluation.

Multiple Viewpoints. ERIC allows comprehensive information-gathering in all disciplines connected with education because unlike a single publication or one author's perspective, the system contains many viewpoints. For example, a single search of CIJE and RIE on the subject classroom discipline will yield views of teachers, principals, education faculty, and researchers.

Career Development. Database literature also helps teacher candidates obtain comprehensive information on career development. From certification requirements in the various states and international education opportunities, to staff development programs and innovative products and techniques, all can be found in ERIC.

Why Should Education Faculty Teach ERIC in the Classroom?

Faculty have special areas of expertise to draw from when teaching the ERIC system. A faculty member can help the student find different theories, practices, specific researchers, and organizations knowledgeable about the subject. Thus, guidance from a faculty member helps the students define the information question and determine how to locate relevant information.

Classroom assignments that follow a library orientation will assure a more thorough understanding of how to find information in ERIC. Learning how to use the system without practice is like learning to drive a car without starting the engine. Students need someone knowledgeable in the subject area to pose specific teaching situations they may encounter for which the ERIC system would be helpful. In this way, using ERIC can become an integral part of teachers' professional lives.

What Should Teacher Candidates Know to Use ERIC Effectively?

To use the ERIC system effectively, teacher education candidates should know three things: how to define the question, how to conduct a search of the print indexes or ask for a computer search, and how to locate the full text of the documents and journal articles.

Defining the Question. Both manual and computer searches begin with defining the "search" question. The more precisely the question is posed, the more "on target" the resources from the system will be. ERIC indexes each document and article using a controlled vocabulary found in the *Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors*. For example, a question like, "What do good elementary school teachers do?" is far too broad. But, "What are some effective *teaching strategies* for *fifth grade?*" yields a list of documents that are indexed by both of the descriptors *Teaching Methods* and *Grade 5*. Exercises

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are available to give the students practice using the *Thesaurus* (Houston 1981).

Conducting the Search. Using the ERIC print indexes in a library is advantageous because this can easily be done independently, and unlike a computer search, which usually involves a fee, the manual search is free. Using print indexes is also the easiest way to locate resources if only a few documents are needed on a specific topic (ERIC Clearinghouse on Social Studies 1981). Other advantages of print indexes are the "serendipitous find" and the ability to change direction without expensive computer manipulations.

To conduct a manual search, the students must be thoroughly familiar with the *Thesaurus*, and then the *RIE* and *CIJE* journals containing the indexes, abstracts, and ordering information needed to locate the complete document or journal article. Specifically, they need to know how to use the author and subject indexes, how to interpret the information contained in the abstract, and where to obtain the materials after they find the identification numbers (ED, ERIC Document, and the EJ, ERIC journal).

A computer search is useful for doing an in-depth literature review when the information question is complex. Computer searches are available in many college and university libraries, school district resource centers, and state department of education offices. Students should identify where the closest ERIC resources are in the Directory of ERIC microfiche collections. In addition, the ERIC database can be searched by using home computers (Klausmeier 1984).

Locating the Text. After locating the identification numbers (ED and EJ) of the documents and journal articles, the students must learn to locate the documents in the microfiche collection and the journals in the serials collection. If a journal is unavailable in a library, a reprint of the article can be ordered from University Microfilms International, Article Reprint Service, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Photocopies of most microfiche documents can be ordered from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 3900 Wheeler Ave., Alexandria, VA 22304.

Some Suggested Activities for Classroom Follow-Up

1. Compile a bibliography of recent documents and journal articles in the ERIC system on a specific topic, such as testing.
2. Locate recent curriculum guides to social studies to update resoures in the school curriculum lab. (Use of RIE)
3. Debate a controversial issue, such as teacher testing and have the students use materials in ERIC to increase awareness about the system's diversity.
4. Prepare lesson plans using ideas retrieved from the ERIC system in a subject area applicable to the class.
5. Prepare a policy paper on a controversial subject, such as merit pay for teachers. (Use of RIE and CIJE)
6. Give an oral presentation about the impact of educational reform efforts, such as teacher career ladders. (Use of RIE and CIJE)
7. Locate statistics about teacher shortages in a particular state. (Use of RIE and CIJE)

References

Many of the following references—those identified with an EJ or ED number—have been abstracted and are in the ERIC data base. The journal articles should be available at most research libraries. The documents (citations with an ED number) are available on microfiche in ERIC microfiche collections at over 700 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Call (800) 227-3742 for price and order information. For a list of ERIC collections in your area, or for information on submitting documents to ERIC, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 293-2450.

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Elizabeth A. Ashburn, Director
Margaret Mann, Associate Director
Penelope A. Purdue, Staff Wrier

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ERIC

Educational Resources Information Center: The nationwide information system initiated in 1966 by the U.S. Department of Education. ERIC is the largest and most frequently used education data base in the world.